

Assessing the English Language requirement

Version 4.0

This guidance explains to decision makers how to assess whether the English Language requirement has been met under [Appendix English Language](#).

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About this guidance

This guidance is for decision makers and explains how to assess whether an applicant has met the English Language requirements.

It applies to the following routes:

- Student
- Skilled Worker
- Representative of an Overseas Business
- T2 Minister of Religion
- International Sportsperson
- UK Ancestry (Settlement only)
- Start-up
- Innovator
- Global Talent (Settlement only)
- Temporary Work - International Agreement (Settlement only)
- Domestic Worker in a Private Household (Settlement only)
- Appendix Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (Settlement only)

Guidance for the English language requirement in other routes can be found here:

- for family partner or parent under Appendix FM and Armed Forces partners see the English language requirement guidance
- for Tier 1 Entrepreneur see the English language Tier 1 guidance
- for settlement in routes other than those listed above see the Knowledge of language and life in the UK guidance

The requirement for each route is set out in the rules for the relevant routes and how it is met is set out in [Appendix English Language of the Immigration Rules](#).

For Knowledge of Life in the UK, you should still see the Knowledge of language and life in the UK guidance.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email Simplification of Rules Team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **4.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **06 October 2021**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This update reflects that UK NARIC, the organisation that evaluates international qualifications and skills, has become UK ENIC due to the UK's exit from the EU. The organisation is now operated and managed by Ecctis Limited, and immigration applicants can access visa and nationality services through the Ecctis website. References to UK NARIC have therefore been replaced by Ecctis.

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The English Language requirement

The English Language requirement is where the rules require an applicant on a particular route to show that they have a specified level of English language ability.

The level of English language required of an applicant is set out in the individual rules for the relevant route – they will be under the heading ‘English language requirement’.

The rules on how the requirement can be met are set out in Appendix English Language in [the Immigration Rules](#).

Required level

The levels come from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). You can find out more about the CEFR levels on the [assessment grid](#).

There are components that are tested:

- reading
- writing
- speaking
- listening

The required level and CEFR component for each route are set out below.

Route	Applying for	Required level the applicant must show (at least)	Required CEFR component	Exemptions
Student	Entry clearance or permission to stay	Either: level B2, where the applicant is studying a course at degree level or above or level B1, where the applicant is studying a pre-sessional course or a course below degree level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reading• writing• speaking• listening	Gifted student concession Applicants who have a disability may be exempt from some components of a SELT where the sponsor certifies they have the required level of ability for their course

Route	Applying for	Required level the applicant must show (at least)	Required CEFR component	Exemptions
Skilled Worker	Entry clearance or permission to stay	level B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading • writing • speaking • listening 	None
Representatives of an Overseas Business	Entry clearance or permission to stay	level A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading • writing • speaking • listening 	None
T2 Minister of Religion	Entry clearance or permission to stay	level B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading • writing • speaking • listening 	None
International Sportsperson	Entry clearance or permission to stay	level A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaking • listening 	None
Start-up	Entry clearance or permission to stay	level B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading • writing • speaking • listening 	None
Innovator	Entry clearance or permission to stay	level B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading • writing • speaking • listening 	None
Main applicant on any route	Settlement	Except where the main applicant has already met the required level at entry clearance or permission to stay (e.g. a Skilled Worker will have already shown the required level), level B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaking • listening 	Age (under 18 / over 65) and physical or mental condition
Dependent Partner or Dependent Child on any route	Settlement	level B1 if exemptions do not apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaking • listening 	Age (under 18 / over 65) and physical or mental condition

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How an applicant can show they meet the English Language requirement

-	Student	Skilled Worker	Representatives of an Overseas Business	T2 Minister of Religion	T2 Sports person	Start-up	Innovator	Main applicant applying for settlement	Dependent applying for settlement
National of a majority English speaking country	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Met the requirement at the required level in a previous successful application	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Academic degree taught or researched in English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Passed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

-	Student	Skilled Worker	Representatives of an Overseas Business	T2 Minister of Religion	T2 Sports person	Start-up	Innovator	Main applicant applying for settlement	Dependent applying for settlement
Secure English Language Test (SELT)									
GCSE, A level or Scottish Higher qualification in English following education in a UK school	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Assessed by a higher education provider with a track record of compliance	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Exempt from some SELT components due to disability and the	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

-	Student	Skilled Worker	Representatives of an Overseas Business	T2 Minister of Religion	T2 Sportsperson	Start-up	Innovator	Main applicant applying for settlement	Dependent applying for settlement
sponsor has confirmed their English language ability									
On a short-term study abroad programme as part of a degree level or above course at a Higher Education Institution in the USA	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Doctor, dentist, nurse, midwife or vet professional body regulation	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Appendix	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

-	Student	Skilled Worker	Representatives of an Overseas Business	T2 Minister of Religion	T2 Sports person	Start-up	Innovator	Main applicant applying for settlement	Dependent applying for settlement
KoLL exception (15 years without meeting the requirement)									

Dependants applying for settlement who have been in the UK with permission for 15 years but have not met the requirement can meet the exception in Appendix KoLL. See the Knowledge of Language and Life in the UK guidance for further details of this.

You can find out how an applicant says they have met the requirement by checking the application form. If the applicant is a national of a majority English speaking country, you will find this in the nationality information on the caseworking system.

More information on how to assess whether the requirement is met is in the rest of this guidance.

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National of a majority English speaking country

You can find the list of majority English speaking countries at EL 4.1 of [Appendix English Language](#).

You must check all the applicant's nationalities declared in their application to confirm whether they meet the requirement.

Dual nationals will meet this requirement if one of their nationalities is included in the majority English speaking country list.

You must check the applicant's passport, travel document, valid national ID card or other satisfactory proof of nationality that they have provided to confirm they are a national of a majority English speaking country. Applicants who are dual nationals do not have to apply in the nationality they are relying on to benefit from this rule. If they have not provided proof of identity for the nationality they are relying on see the guidance below on [missing or inadequate evidence](#).

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Met in a previous application

If the applicant says they met the requirement in a previous successful application you must confirm this by checking their immigration history on all available systems (HOPS, CID, Atlas and Proviso).

The previous application must have been successful and must show the required level of English language ability on the route they are now applying for.

If the previous application shows a lower level of English language you may contact the applicant and tell them they have one month to show they have reached the higher level required and that their application will be put on hold to enable them to do so. You must tell them how to provide the updated information to you.

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Academic degree taught in English

If the applicant has said that they met the requirement through an academic degree taught in English, you must first check which country the degree was taught in.

You must check the evidence of the award of the degree. A degree certificate, official transcript or letter from the awarding institution containing the equivalent information is acceptable evidence of a degree. You must also check whether the degree satisfies the requirements to show proof of English.

Checking a degree certificate is genuine

You must always check the applicant's degree certificate.

The kind of information you should normally expect to see on a degree certificate, transcript or degree letter includes the:

- applicant's name
- type and level of the degree
- awarding body or institution
- date the degree was awarded

You would normally expect evidence of qualifications to be on official headed paper and for any letter to be signed by a person in an official capacity and to include an address and contact details.

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If you have reason to doubt the degree is genuine or the information is complete, you should seek to verify it with the awarding institution.

To verify a degree awarded outside of the UK you must follow the process in place for verifications within your team. If you are not sure of the process within your team, you must ask your line manager.

To verify a degree awarded in the UK, you must contact the awarding institution by:

- finding the contact details of the institution on their website
- telephoning and requesting a fax number or email address for student records
- faxing or emailing a scan of your request with a copy of the certificate or transcript

If you do not receive a reply within a reasonable period (at least 3 days), you should telephone the institution to request a response.

The awarding institution may ask for the written consent of the applicant before disclosing any information. If this happens, fax or email a scan of the signed declarations section of the application form which gives the Home Office the applicant's permission to verify documents.

Academic degree from the UK

If the degree was awarded by a UK body, you need to check that the:

- awarding body is recognised in the UK (to confirm the degree was actually issued in the UK)
- degree is UK bachelor's level or above (including Postgraduate degrees)
- qualification is academic, not technical or professional – if in doubt, you can check that with the degree awarding body

You can check that a awarding body is recognised in the UK in the ['Check if a university or college is officially recognised' page on GOV.UK](#).

You can check the UK qualifications levels on the ['Find a regulated qualification' page on GOV.UK](#).

Academic degree from a majority English speaking country (except Canada)

If the degree is from a majority English speaking country listed at EL 4.1 of Appendix English language (except for Canada which is not treated as a majority English language speaking country for this purpose), you must check that the:

- degree is equivalent to a UK bachelor's level degree or above
- qualification is academic, not technical or professional

You can check this on the Ecctis (formerly UK NARIC, a service that provides information, advice and opinion on academic, vocational and professional qualifications and skills from all over the world) Visa and Nationality statement that the applicant provides as evidence with their application, which must confirm that the degree is equivalent to a UK bachelor's degree or above.

You can see an example of a [Visa and Nationality statement on the Ecctis website](#).

Academic degree from a non-majority English speaking country

If the degree is from a non-majority English country or from Canada you must check on the Visa and Nationality statement from Ecctis (formerly UK NARIC), which the applicant provides as evidence with their application, that the:

- degree is equivalent to a UK bachelor's level degree or above
- qualification is academic, not technical or professional
- degree was taught in English

You can see an example of a [Visa and Nationality statement on the Ecctis website](#).

If the Visa and Nationality statement does not confirm that the degree meets all the requirements you can contact the applicant and give them an opportunity to contact Ecctis to obtain a revised statement which confirms the requirements are met.

You should not accept a UK ENIC Statement of Compatibility as evidence of English ability as this is not confirmed on the statement.

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Applicant cannot provide proof of their degree

If the applicant says they cannot provide proof of their degree, for example because the certificate is lost and a new one cannot be obtained, you can:

- review previous applications on our case working systems to see if the Home Office has already accepted that the applicant has a relevant degree
- seek further information from the applicant or the awarding body on whether it is possible to obtain further evidence of the degree

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Secure English language test (SELT)

If the applicant says they are relying on a SELT, they must provide a reference number on their application. This can be used to search for and verify the SELT using the online portal. You can find further guidance on the online portal on the 'Secure English language tests online verification systems' page on Horizon.

The applicant must have scored at least the minimum level required in each component of the test.

All components of the test must be taken in one sitting.

If an applicant has taken the test and failed one or more of the components, then they must retake the test in its entirety. It is not possible to retake individual components.

You must check that the test is an approved test with [an approved provider](#) at the date the test was taken.

SELTs are valid for 2 years. If the SELT certificate has expired within the one month before the date of application, you can contact the applicant and allow them time to take a new test at the appropriate level and tell them the application will be on hold for one month. You must tell them how to provide the updated information to you.

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GCSE, A Level or Scottish equivalent in English

This applies to Students, Skilled Workers, Start-up migrants and Innovators applying for entry clearance or permission to stay.

If the applicant has said on their application that they are relying on a GCSE or A Level or Scottish National Qualification at level 4 or 5 or, Scottish Higher or Advanced Higher in English you must check their age, the date of their qualification, and the school or college (including Sixth Form college) where that is included on the exam certificate, to confirm that they attended school in the UK while under 18.

The exam does not need to be taken when the applicant is under 18, as some Students will turn 18 during the academic year.

Applicants cannot rely on GCSE or A levels gained through adult education or correspondence courses.

You must check that the qualification is in English literature or English language – qualifications in other subjects are not accepted.

If needed, you can find out information about a school here:

- [‘Get information about schools’ page on GOV.UK](#) for England
- [‘Find a school’ page on GOV.SCOT](#) for Scotland
- [‘My local school’ page on GOV.WALES](#) for Wales
- [‘Schools plus’ page](#) on the Department of Education for Northern Ireland

You must check that the qualification was issued by an [Ofqual](#), [SQA](#), [Qualifications Wales](#) or [CCEA regulated awarding body in the UK](#).

You must be satisfied that the evidence of the qualification is genuine and the applicant attended school in the UK while under the age of 18. If you have doubts you can:

- contact the exam awarding body to verify the evidence
- contact the applicant to ask for further information (be specific about what you want, for example written confirmation from the school that they attended)

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Additional options for Student applications

Student sponsors must assess their students' English language ability to make sure they meet the English language requirement before issuing a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS).

CAS fields

The CAS includes fields which allow the Student sponsor to provide details of the English language level attained for:

- speaking
- listening
- reading
- writing

The CAS also includes fields to name the English language test provider (if one has been used).

If a sponsor has not provided information in the fields in the English language section, they must provide the relevant details in the 'Evidence used to obtain offer' free text box for the CAS.

If the Student sponsor completes the English language section on the CAS

If the sponsor answers 'yes' to the 'Is SELT (Secure English Language Test) required?' question, the following fields become mandatory:

- English language level attained
- English language test provider

If the sponsor answers 'no' to the 'Is SELT required?' question, the following field becomes mandatory:

- reason not required

If the sections are not complete you should contact the Student sponsor and ask them to supply a revised CAS. If the reason supplied is not credible you should refuse the application.

Assessed by a Higher Educational Provider (HEP)

If the applicant says they have been assessed by a higher education provider with a track record of compliance the evidence will be on the CAS.

You should check that the sponsor is a HEP with a track record of compliance. You can check [the Sponsor register on GOV.UK](#).

You should check that the CAS includes confirmation that the applicant has been assessed and the method of assessment used. If details are missing, you should contact the HEP to require them to update the CAS.

The CAS must confirm either that they have English language at level B2 or, if they have a combined CAS which includes a pre-sessional course, they have passed a SELT at level B1 and the CAS confirms they will reach level B2 by the end of the course.

Applicant is exempt from part of the SELT due to disability

Where the applicant has been exempted from part of the SELT by the Student sponsor due to a disability, you must check on the CAS that the sponsor confirms they have the required level of English language ability to complete their course

If this information is not included, you should check with the sponsor.

Short term study abroad programme

If the applicant says they are studying in the UK on a short term study abroad programme they must be studying in the USA and the course must lead to them gaining a qualification from the overseas Higher Education Institution at least equivalent level to a UK bachelor's degree.

You must check that the applicant has confirmation from Ecctis (formerly UK NARIC) that the qualification they are studying for is at least equivalent to a UK degree, which is confirmed on the CAS.

You must check that the CAS includes details of the overseas Higher Education Institution. If details are missing, you can contact the sponsor to require them to update the CAS.

Gifted student concession

The English language requirement does not apply to applicants who are considered to be 'gifted students' by their Student sponsor. To qualify as a gifted student, they must meet both of the following requirements:

- the applicant must have been offered a place on a course at RQF level 6 or above, or SCQF level 9 or above, at a HEP with a track record of compliance
- the CAS must have been authorised by the academic registrar of the institution, and the academic registrar must confirm that they have personally approved the waiving of the English language requirement

If an applicant is a gifted student, you must check that this is recorded on the CAS (you do not need to see a letter from the college or university).

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Additional option for Skilled Worker applications

Medical professional regulation

If an applicant is being sponsored to work as a doctor, dentist, nurse or midwife they will meet the English language requirement if they have passed an English language assessment which is accepted as a requirement for registration by the relevant regulated professional body in the United Kingdom. As the assessment is a requirement for registration and employment by the sponsor, you do not need to do further checks where the applicant is applying under one of these SOC codes:

- 2211 – Medical Practitioners
- 2215 – Dental Practitioners
- 2231 – Nurses; and
- 2232 – Midwives

If there are reasons to doubt their occupation, you can check they are registered with their relevant professional body here:

- [Doctors - General Medical Council](#)
- [Dentists - General Dental Council](#)
- [Nurses and Midwives – Nursing and Midwifery Council](#)

Veterinary professional regulation

If an applicant is being sponsored to work as a veterinary professional, they will meet the English language requirement if they have passed an English language assessment which is accepted as a requirement for registration by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) regulated professional body in the United Kingdom.

This applies to applicants applying to enter or stay as a Skilled Worker under SOC code 2216.

The applicant must be registered as a UK practicing veterinary surgeon with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons which includes reaching the required level on the veterinary version of the Occupational English Test (OET) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams. The applicant must confirm that they have met the RCVS's English language requirements as part of their application.

You can check that an applicant is currently registered as a UK practicing veterinary surgeon with the RCVS here:

- [RCVS – Find a vet surgeon](#)

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Exemptions from English language for applications for settlement

Age

Applicants aged under 18 or 65 or over on the date of application (which is calculated according to the definition of 'date of application' in [paragraph 6 of the Immigration Rules](#)) do not need to show they meet the English language requirement. If in doubt, you can check an applicant's age in the personal information on the caseworking system.

Physical or mental condition

An applicant is exempt from meeting the English language requirement if they have a disability (a physical or mental condition) that prevents them from meeting the requirement. You should check the application form to confirm if the applicant has said this exemption applies to them. Where the applicant says the exemption applies they are asked to give reasons and provide evidence that you must consider.

Examples of when an applicant is exempt is where the applicant:

- is suffering from a long-term or ongoing illness or disability (which may last for years) that severely restricts their ability to learn English or to take the test
- is suffering from a serious or life threatening illness such as cancer, which may involve treatment over the course of several months that severely restricts their ability to learn English or to take the test has a mental condition which prevents them from speaking or learning English to the required standard

You must consider what the evidence shows about how the condition would prevent the applicant from learning English or taking a secure English language test (SELT), for example:

- if they are deaf and cannot show they meet the listening and / or speaking requirement
- if they are unable to speak or have a speech impediment which limits their ability to communicate in English
- if they are having cancer treatment and are too ill to attend a SELT due to chemotherapy
- if they have a learning disability which means they cannot demonstrate English to the required level

You should consider all the circumstance of the case and explain your decision on the exemption. For example:

- Does the condition affect the applicant's ability to meet the requirement? - check any medical evidence addresses this point (unless it is clear) and if it is

too generic you may want to seek further information - if it does not, the exemption does not apply

- How serious is the condition? - if it is life-limiting or serious and the position is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future you should apply the exemption
- How long is the condition likely to last? - if the medical evidence is that the applicant will not be able to meet the requirement in the foreseeable future you should apply the exemption
- if the evidence is that the applicant's condition will improve and they are likely to be able to meet the requirement within a few months you should consider putting the application on hold and telling the applicant they have a specified time to meet the requirement (as they may have had to apply before they could take the test to preserve their existing permission)

If you have doubts about the medical evidence you should discuss with a senior caseworker.

Test centres can cater for a variety of disabilities, such as blindness. An applicant may be able to do the test even if they produce evidence of a disability where reasonable adjustments are possible.

Evidence of physical or mental condition

If an applicant claims to have a physical or mental condition, they must provide original and current medical evidence from a medical practitioner. There is no specified evidence for the medical exemption under Appendix English Language. This could include a letter from a registered [medical practitioner](#) in the UK, or the medical waiver [proforma](#).

Each application must be considered on its own merits and will depend on the facts in each case. If you are not satisfied that the applicant has provided sufficient evidence to enable you to decide whether the exemption applies you should follow the guidance on [missing or inadequate evidence](#).

Covid: exceptional circumstances

You must check the latest guidance on [Covid exceptional circumstances](#) relating to English language testing.

For Students, the [Covid-19: Guidance for Student sponsors, migrants and for Short-term students](#) sets out when student sponsors may exceptionally self-assess English language ability.

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Evidence and checks

Interviews

If after reviewing all the evidence, you have doubts about an applicant's credibility, including their English Language ability, you may require them to attend an interview. See Casework guidance for the Student and Child Student routes, under the section "Student and Child Student: interviews" for guidance on when and how to do this.

For other routes, you should discuss with your senior caseworker.

Assessing the evidence

You must carefully review the information on the application form and other available evidence before deciding whether you are satisfied on the balance of probabilities (it is more likely than not) that the English language requirement is met.

Although the burden of proof is on the applicant, if they say they meet the requirement but they have not yet provided sufficient evidence you should consider whether there are reasonable steps you could take to help them show that, for example by asking them for further information, or by verifying evidence, before deciding the application.

If the applicant provides evidence that shows the requirement is met and you do not accept that the evidence is genuine the burden of proof is then on you to show that it is more likely than not that the evidence is not genuine. In such cases you must also consider the guidance on deception, false representations and non-disclosure of relevant facts.

Format of evidence

The rules no longer set out specific format requirements for most documents. This doesn't mean that format is irrelevant. It will help you assess if a piece of evidence is genuine and if it provides the information you need to be satisfied the requirement is met. But it does mean you must not refuse an application because the evidence is not in a particular format.

If evidence, such as a qualification or transcript, does not include the information you would normally expect you should consider whether to take further action to verify it.

Missing or inadequate evidence

Appendix English Language sets out where specific evidence must be provided. The applicant will be told what evidence to provide as part of the application process. However, sometimes evidence is missing or inadequate and you should consider seeking further information or making verification checks when, for example:

- evidence is missing that you believe the applicant has, or could obtain

- evidence is inadequate but could be clarified, for example, if the applicant says they are relying on a degree taught in English, but the transcript only gives module marks and does not state that a degree was awarded, you can ask the applicant to obtain further information from the awarding body that the degree was awarded

You may decide to ask for further information from the applicant, sponsor, or the awarding body or other organisation, or make verification checks in other cases if you think they would help assess whether the English language requirement is met. If you are not sure whether they would help, please discuss this with your senior case worker.

You do not need to contact the applicant if evidence is missing or inadequate, but you do not need the information because you can get it elsewhere - for example, from the CAS or from a previous application; receiving it would make no difference to your decision (for example because they would still be refused for other reasons)

If evidence is missing or inadequate, you do not have to offer the applicant an opportunity to prove they meet the requirement in a different way. For example:

- if the applicant says they are relying on a degree taught in English, but the evidence is not sufficient to satisfy you of that, you do not need to check whether they meet the requirement some other way for example you don't need to ask them to provide a Secure English Language Test (SELT) reference number

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Refusals: English language requirement not met

If you are not satisfied the English language requirement is met, you must refuse the application.

You must explain in the refusal decision why you are not satisfied the requirement is met. For example, whether the evidence required in Appendix English language was not provided or whether that evidence was provided but was not sufficient or was not accepted as genuine.

Note that if the reason for refusal is that you believe the evidence is not genuine, the burden of proof is then on you to show in the refusal notice that it is more likely than not that the evidence is not genuine. You must therefore explain the reasons for this in your refusal. In such cases you must also consider the guidance on false representations and follow the relevant procedures in it.

You should use plain and concise language and avoid jargon and acronyms.

Example refusal wording 1

SELT (Secure English Language Test) does not show required level in all 4 components:

I am not satisfied that you meet the English Language requirement. The English Language test result you provided shows you have not met the required level of [B2] in one of the four components of the test (writing). You must obtain level B2 in all four components. You were contacted on DATE and given XX days to retake the test and provide evidence that you obtained level B2 in all four components, but you failed to do so.

Example refusal wording 2

Awarding body not recognised:

I am not satisfied that you meet the English Language requirement. You provided a qualification certificate from XX to show YY, but I am not satisfied that the certificate you provided is genuine because (reasons why, for example, the awarding body is not a UK recognised body / the awarding body have confirmed the certificate is a fake, and so on).

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